



**The Commonwealth of Massachusetts Commission on Gay,
Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Youth**

Administrative Office
250 Washington Street – 3rd floor, Boston MA 02108
(617) 624-5495 □ www.mass.gov/cgly

ARTHUR LIPKIN
CHAIR

ED BYRNE
VICE CHAIR

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Commission on Bullying Prevention
Office of Attorney General Martha Coakley
One Ashburton Place
Boston, MA 02108

Members of the Commission:

The MA Commission on GLBT Youth thanks the Commission on Bullying Prevention for this opportunity to address the Commonwealth's recently enacted anti-bullying legislation.

We, like others in the GLBT community, have always preferred an anti-bullying bill with enumerated categories of victimization. Although the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's (DESE) model policy contains enumeration of targeted groups, we hope that the legislature will be persuaded to add enumeration to the explicit provisions of the law.

We were pleased by the statute's mandate for science-based policies and guidelines. We were not pleased, however, when the DESE's regulations were confined to notification and enforcement. Other aspects of the statute that we consider vital, like research-based prevention and professional development, were deemed outside the scope of regulations. We are frankly distressed that these exacting regulations were so narrowly drawn.

The Commission on GLBT Youth regards prevention as the keystone of any anti-bullying effort and yet the regulations prioritize detecting, reporting, and punishing bullies.

Please consider the following:

1. Anti-GLBT bullying is endemic in our schools. Study after study has documented both the prevalence of anti-GLBT bullying in America's schools and the negative impact upon the health and well-being of its victims. The DESE's own data from Youth Risk Behavior Surveys over the last 12 years offer irrefutable evidence that GLBT youth suffer disproportionate bullying and violence, compared with their heterosexual peers.
2. The impact of bias-related bullying on its targets has been shown to be more damaging than the impact of general bullying.
3. GLB students of color and transgender students are at great risk of negative health outcomes associated with being bullied.

For your study, we have attached a research brief by Dr. Paul Poteat of the Lynch School of Education at Boston College, an expert on school bullying. (See attachment.) Permit me also to summarize a few findings of a soon-to-be-published research paper, based on two California surveys:

(The 2007-2008 California Healthy Kids Survey included 602,612 students in Grades 6 through 12; and the 2009 Dane County Youth Assessment included 17,366 students in Grades 7 through 12)

Among those students who were harassed, some 40% were harassed for bias-related reasons.

- 10% - 15% reported GLB-based harassment
- 16% - 18% reported race-based harassment
- 10% reported harassment based on religion and gender
- 7% reported harassment due to a disability

Reducing any type of bias-related bullying requires changing the culture of the school. In the case of anti-GLBT bullying that means addressing homophobia and transphobia directly in and out of the classroom.

The Commission emphasizes that the anti-bullying model policy requires that professional development include:

- (i) developmentally appropriate strategies to prevent bullying incidents;
- (ii) developmentally appropriate strategies for immediate, effective interventions to stop bullying incidents;
- (iii) information regarding the complex interaction and power differential that can take place between and among a perpetrator, victim and witnesses to the bullying;
- (iv) research findings on bullying, including information about specific categories of students who have been shown to be particularly at risk for bullying in the school environment.”

→We call on the Commonwealth, under Section 13 of Chapter 92 of the Acts of 2010 (i.e., Monitoring and Compliance), to enforce a standard of professional development that includes pertinent research on youth development; on racism, sexism, ableism, religious bigotry, homophobia, and transphobia; and on GLBT victimization and its consequences.

Such professional development will equip educators to carry out the curricular mandate of the model policy: “age-appropriate instruction on bullying prevention in each grade that is incorporated into the curriculum of the school district or school.” The Commission believes that any successful anti-bullying curriculum must directly address the underlying causes of anti-GLBT bullying and must have as its goal an understanding and accepting school community.

→We call on the Commonwealth, under Section 13 of Chapter 92 of the Acts of 2010 (i.e., Monitoring and Compliance), to monitor all anti-bullying curricula to ensure the developmentally appropriate inclusion of racism, sexism, ableism, religious bigotry, homophobia, and transphobia.

As for notification, the Commission on GLBT Youth has gladly partnered with ESE in crafting guidance on parental notification that should help prevent the further harm that could come from “outing” a targeted GLBT student in the reporting process. Should students’ privacy rights be established later in regard to the reporting of bullying, we believe this guidance will still be valuable.

Finally, the legislative and executive branches’ intent to eradicate bullying in our schools

and communities will never succeed without adequate resources for implementation and training. We are all familiar with the fate of most unfunded mandates.

→We call on the Commonwealth to provide the money and expertise to support the level of implementation and training that will make the anti-bullying law a success.

The Commission on GLBT Youth is happy to assist you further in realizing the goals in the ongoing anti-bullying campaign.

Respectfully,

Arthur Lipkin

Chair

Attachment:

Addressing Bias-Related Victimization as Part of Bullying Prevention and Intervention

As prevention and intervention programs are developed and implemented to address bullying in schools, it is critical that they adequately address bias and prejudice, and adequately attend to students who traditionally are disproportionately victimized. In many instances, the victimization that students experience from their peers is motivated by bias. This can include victimization on account of race or ethnicity, actual or perceived sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, disability, social class, religious beliefs, or other social identities that are stigmatized or marginalized in our society (Almeida et al., 2010; Kosciw, Greytak, & Diaz, 2009; Rose, Espelage, & Monda-Amaya, 2009; Russell, Clark, & Laub, 2009). This specific type of victimization is associated with a number of health concerns and may carry even stronger negative consequences in comparison to victimization that does not reflect bias, prejudice, or discrimination (Poteat & Espelage, 2007; Russell et al., 2009; Swearer et al., 2008). Thus, we maintain that for bullying prevention and intervention programs to be more effective at promoting safe and welcoming schools for all students, they must address issues related to student diversity and issues of bias and discrimination.

There is substantial and robust empirical evidence that sexual minority youth (i.e., lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or questioning youth) are disproportionately victimized at school (Berlan, Corliss, Field, Goodman, & Austin, 2010; Poteat, Aragon, Espelage, & Koenig, 2009; Williams, Connolly, Pepler, & Craig, 2005). The large majority of sexual minority youth experience victimization in schools because of their sexual orientation, and they often describe their schools as unsafe and unwelcoming (Chesir-Teran & Hughes, 2009; Kosciw et al., 2009; Rivers, 2001). Notably, these high rates of victimization have changed little over the past decade (Kosciw et al., 2009; Pilkington & D'Augelli, 1995; Rivers, 2001). In turn, bias-related victimization is strongly associated with elevated physical health, mental health, social, and academic concerns (D'Augelli, Pilkington, & Hershberger, 2002; Poteat & Espelage, 2007; Rivers, 2001; Russell, Seif, & Truong, 2001). Indeed, these higher rates of victimization partially

account for why some sexual minority youth report elevated health concerns over their heterosexual peers (Poteat et al., 2009; Williams et al., 2005). Thus, addressing bias-related bullying is integral in order to promote and ensure the health of these students. These findings are comparable for racial minority youth, where research has documented that racial or ethnic bias-related victimization and unwelcoming racial school climates are associated with poorer health and academic performance (Clark, Coleman, & Novak, 2004; Fisher, Wallace, & Fenton, 2000; Mattison & Aber, 2007; Wong, Eccles, & Sameroff, 2003). Building on this, we note the diversity within the sexual minority youth community, such as sexual minority youth of color and transgender youth, and the need for particular attention to these groups of students as part of programming provided to teachers, administrators, and staff. Sexual minority youth of color must contend with multiple forms of discrimination and bias-related victimization on account of their race and sexual orientation (Balsam, Huang, Fieland, Simoni, & Walters, 2004; Rosario, Schrimshaw, & Hunter, 2004). Without adequate support structures, students whose social identities reflect multiple minority statuses can face even greater health concerns as a result of discrimination and bullying by peers at school (Russell et al., 2009). Finally, transgender youth remain a critically underserved population, yet who are often victimized because of their gender expression (Grossman & D'Augelli, 2006; Kosciw et al., 2009; Ryan & Rivers, 2003).

As highlighted above, it remains critical to address the continued disparities faced by sexual minority youth in any bullying intervention programs. In tandem, it is equally important to identify and promote resilience among these students, in part through bullying prevention efforts at school. A number of approaches can be taken foster safe and welcoming schools for sexual minority youth. At the individual level, this includes working with students to promote empathy, respect, and mutual support for their peers, in part through speaking out against prejudice, the use of homophobic epithets, and bullying against these youth (Russell et al., 2009). Training programs for teachers, administrators, and staff should specifically address diversity issues and bias-related bullying so that they know how to recognize and intervene appropriately when this behavior occurs (Russell et al., 2009). Similarly, teachers should actively cultivate classroom environments where homophobic epithets and other expressions of prejudice and bias-related behavior are not acceptable. At the larger school level, diversity issues, including those around sexual orientation, should be included as part of standard course

materials. Also, student organizations, such as Gay-Straight Alliances, that promote diversity affirming attitudes and behaviors among students should be supported. These are only several approaches that schools can take as preventive-focused efforts to address bias-related bullying in schools. Programming and materials that place an emphasis on diversity as part of fostering safe and welcoming school climates can be found through national organizations such as GLSEN (Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network; www.glsen.org), PFLAG (Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays; www.pflag.org), and Groundspark's Respect for All Project (www.groundspark.org).

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